

ADHD: A Manufactured Crisis or a Symptom of a Broken System?

(EART: *Estimated Average Reading Time*: 4–5 minutes)

Have you ever noticed how easily we let labels define us? Take ADHD, for example. It is one of those diagnoses that seem to pop up everywhere, reshaping how people see themselves. A child who once seemed perfectly fine suddenly wears the label of a “disorder,” all because someone—a doctor, a teacher, or even a well-meaning friend—said, “This explains everything about you.” And just like that, behaviors that might have been chalked up to habit or circumstance now come with a medical stamp of approval. It is like slapping a “fragile” sticker on a box that does not need it.

Nevertheless, here is the thing: if you dig into the science behind ADHD, you will find something surprising. Much of it is riddled with vague, uncertain language—words like “might,” “maybe,” “perhaps,” and “potentially.” It is as if the foundation of this diagnosis is built on shifting sand, not solid ground. This ambiguity is no accident. Instead, it is a convenient way for Big Pharma to open the door to a completely new market of lifelong customers. After all, what better way to guarantee profits than to turn everyday struggles into medical conditions?

Think about this: Andrew Kaufman, a critic of the ADHD narrative, pointed out a striking inconsistency. Kids who can focus on video games for hours suddenly cannot pay attention in class. Is this a sign of a disorder? Or is it more likely a reflection of a rigid, outdated educational system that stifles curiosity and individuality? Maybe it is not the kids who need fixing, but the system that demands they sit still and conform to a one-size-fits-all model of learning.

Kerry McDonald, an advocate for alternative education, makes a powerful case for this in her article, *What the Back-to-School Adderall Shortage Really Tells Us*. She argues that traditional schooling plays a significant role in the rise of ADHD diagnoses. By forcing children into a rigid mold, schools drive parents and teachers to turn to medication as a quick fix. Instead, McDonald calls for flexible, individualized learning approaches that celebrate diversity in how children learn.

It is a refreshing perspective that shifts the focus from medicating the child to addressing the system that is failing them.

The issue does not stop there. Our toxic environment plays a huge role in shaping behavior, but how often do we stop to think about it? From vaccines and ultra-processed foods to toxic cleaning products and synthetic fragrances, things that can harm both our bodies and minds surround us. Could it be that these external factors, rather than some inherent flaw in a child's brain, are driving the behaviors we are so quick to label as ADHD? What if, instead of reaching for a prescription, we cleaned up our environments and embraced healthier lifestyles?

In Islām, safeguarding the body (*Ḥifẓ al-Badan*) is a key objective of the *Sharī'ah al-Islāmīyah* (Islamic Law), as is safeguarding the mind (*Ḥifẓ al-'Aql*). Consuming harmful substances or exposing ourselves to toxicity goes against these principles. Allāh warns us¹: **“Do not kill yourselves [or others]. Surely, Allāh is ever Merciful to you”**². If we address these factors as well as all the toxins that surround us, we may find that many so-called disorders disappear entirely.

Even Dr. Leon Eisenberg, the psychiatrist credited with popularizing ADHD, had a change of heart late in life. Just seven months before his death, he admitted in an interview with *Der Spiegel* that **“ADHD is a prime example of a fabricated disorder.”** Eisenberg argued that we have placed far too much emphasis on genetics while ignoring the real, pressing issues, like family dynamics and societal pressures that contribute to children's struggles. He pointed out that addressing these root causes takes time and effort, something many ~~drug-dealing quacks~~ professionals are not willing to invest. A pill, as he noted, is a far quicker solution.

So where does this leave us? Perhaps it is time to question the labels we so readily accept and the systems that create them. Instead of medicating behaviors, let us look at the bigger picture—our schools, our homes, and our environments. Change starts with asking hard questions and being unafraid of inconvenient truths. After all, no child should grow up believing he is broken when the world around him might be what needs fixing.

Wallāhu Al-Muwaffiq (And Allāh is the One Who Grants Success).

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References

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- McDonald, K. (2022). *What the Back-to-School Adderall Shortage Really Tells Us*. Foundation for Economic Education. Retrieved from <https://fee.org/articles/what-the-back-to-school-adderall-shortage-really-tells-us/>

¹ ‘Allāmah ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān b. Nāṣir as-Sa’dī said in his *Tafsīr* (Quranic explanation) of this verse: “Included in this is subjecting oneself to destruction (*ilqā’ bi-n-Nafs*), and engaging in dangerous actions (*Afāl al-Akḥṭār*) that lead to ruin (*at-Talaf*) and destruction (*al-Halāk*).”

² Sūrah an-Nisā’, 4:29

³ *Rajab*: The seventh month of the Islamic lunar calendar.

In Islām, four months are considered sacred (*al-Ashhur al-Ḥurum*). These are:

- *Muḥarram* – The first month of the Islamic lunar calendar.
- *Rajab* – The seventh month.
- *Dhūl Qi‘dah* – The eleventh month.
- *Dhūl Ḥijjah* – The twelfth month.

⁴ The “H” (in Arabic: هـ) is an abbreviation for *هِجْرَة* (*Hijrah*/Emigration). It refers to the year in which the Prophet ﷺ migrated to Medina (transliterated as *al-Madīnah an-Nabawīyah*). As Muslims, we adhere to our own calendar whenever possible, known in Arabic as *التَّوْقِيمُ الْهَجْرِي* (transliterated as *at-Taqwīm al-Hijrī*).